

DRAFT Environmental Assessment Garrity Mountain Wildlife Management Area Addition

August 2018



Region 2
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
3201 Spurgin Road
Missoula, MT 59804



THE OUTSIDE IS IN US ALL.

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1.0 PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION

1.1 Proposed Action and Need

This environmental assessment (EA) evaluates Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks' (FWP) proposal to acquire fee title to approximately 154.05 acres (hereafter, 154 acres) of private land, as an addition to FWP's adjoining 9,635-acre Garrity Mountain Wildlife Management Area (GMWMA). The private parcel is currently owned by YT Timber, LLC (hereafter, YT Timber) and is located 7 miles west of Anaconda in Deer Lodge County (Figure 1). The acquisition and subsequent inclusion of this property into GMWMA would protect a migration corridor for bighorn sheep and key habitat for bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout, as well as preclude potential subdivision or development of this parcel and the negative impacts to fish and wildlife that could follow development. The parcel is in an area identified in the Natural Resource Damage Programs' (NRDP) Restoration Plan (2012) as a priority landscape for conservation actions.

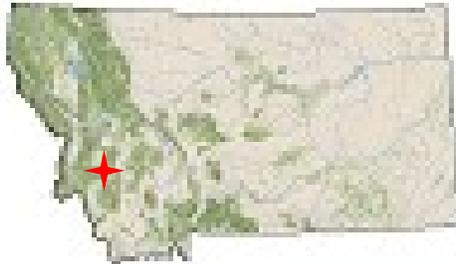


Figure 1. Location of Garrity Mountain WMA

All acreage acquired by FWP under this proposal would become part of the larger GMWMA and would be managed for fish and wildlife habitat as well as public recreational access and opportunities. Garrity Mountain WMA is comprised of two separate units or property, currently totaling 9,635 acres. The Garrity Mountain (northern) unit totals approximately 7,370 acres and would increase to approximately 7,524 after the proposed acquisition. The Clear Creek (southern) unit would remain unchanged at approximately 2,265 acres. Both GMWMA units provide critical winter range for elk, deer, and bighorn sheep. Warm Springs and Barker creeks run through the proposed addition and provide habitat for bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout, both Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN).

GMWMA offers opportunities for outdoor recreation such as hunting, fishing, hiking, camping, horseback riding, and bird watching. The WMA is within 30 minutes (or less) of Deer Lodge, Butte, and Anaconda, and 1½ hours from Missoula and Helena.

1.2 Objectives of the Proposed Action

- Add critical fish and wildlife habitat to the existing GMWMA
- Enhance recreational opportunities and provide additional access to GMWMA for the public
- Help buffer GMWMA from subdivisions or development along its northern border
- Protect a bighorn sheep migration route between Blue-Eyed Nellie WMA and GMWMA.

1.3. Legal Description and Location of Properties

The current properties considered for acquisition are located about 7 miles west of Anaconda along Montana Highway 1 in Deer Lodge County, bordered to the south by GMWMA and United States Forest Service (USFS) lands (Figure 2-4). The legal description for the two parcels, totaling 154.05 acres are:

123.39 acres; S28, T05N, R12W. COS 396D

29.66 acres (that include a portion of Barker Creek) would be part of a boundary line adjustment and added to the above-mentioned 123.39-acre parcel. These 29.66 acres would come from S29, T05N, R12W, Lots 2-7, W2NE4 S of highway less tracts sold (Figure 4).

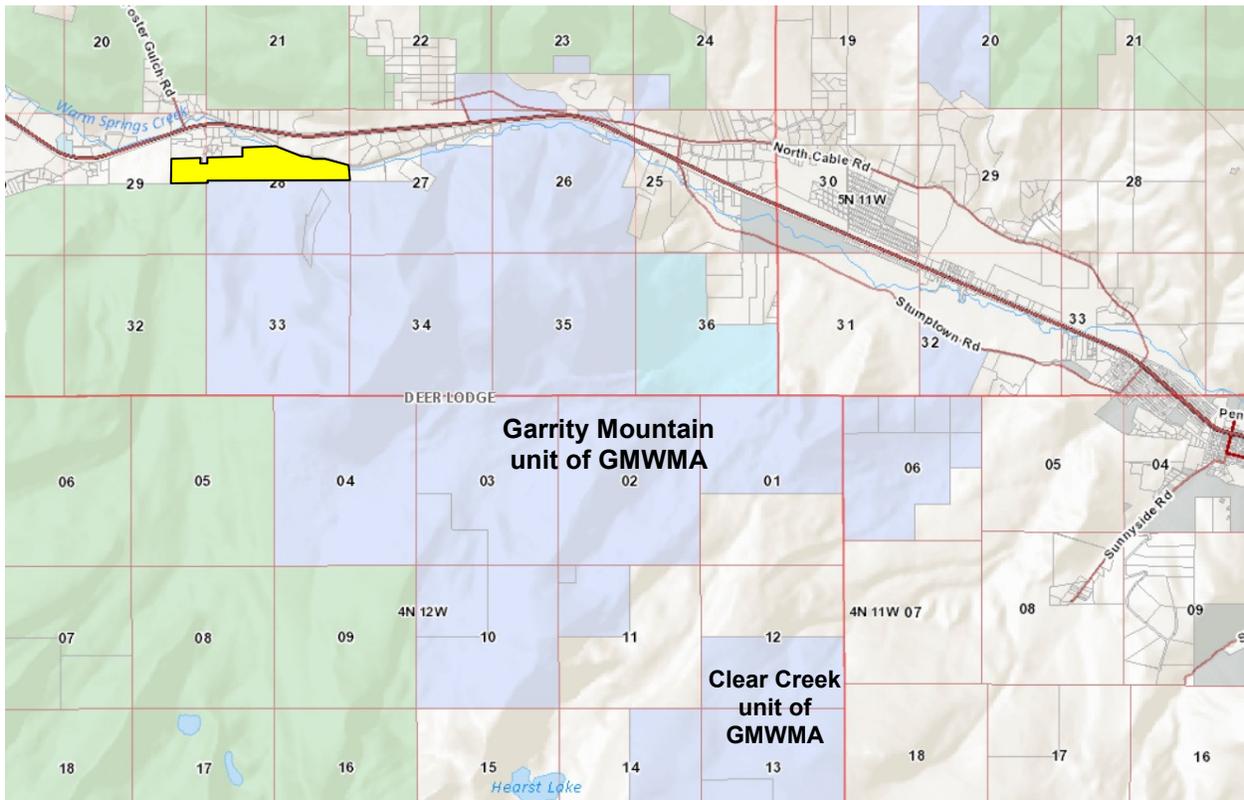


Figure 2. Proposed addition (yellow area) to Garrity Mountain WMA (GMWMA), west of Anaconda in Deer Lodge County. Other land ownership: white is private, green is US Forest Service, lavender blue is FWP, and blue is state school trust.



Figure 3. Looking westerly along Lime Spur Road--part of the boundary of the proposed addition to Garrity Mountain WMA--towards Montana Highway 1, with Warm Springs Creek left (south) side of photo.

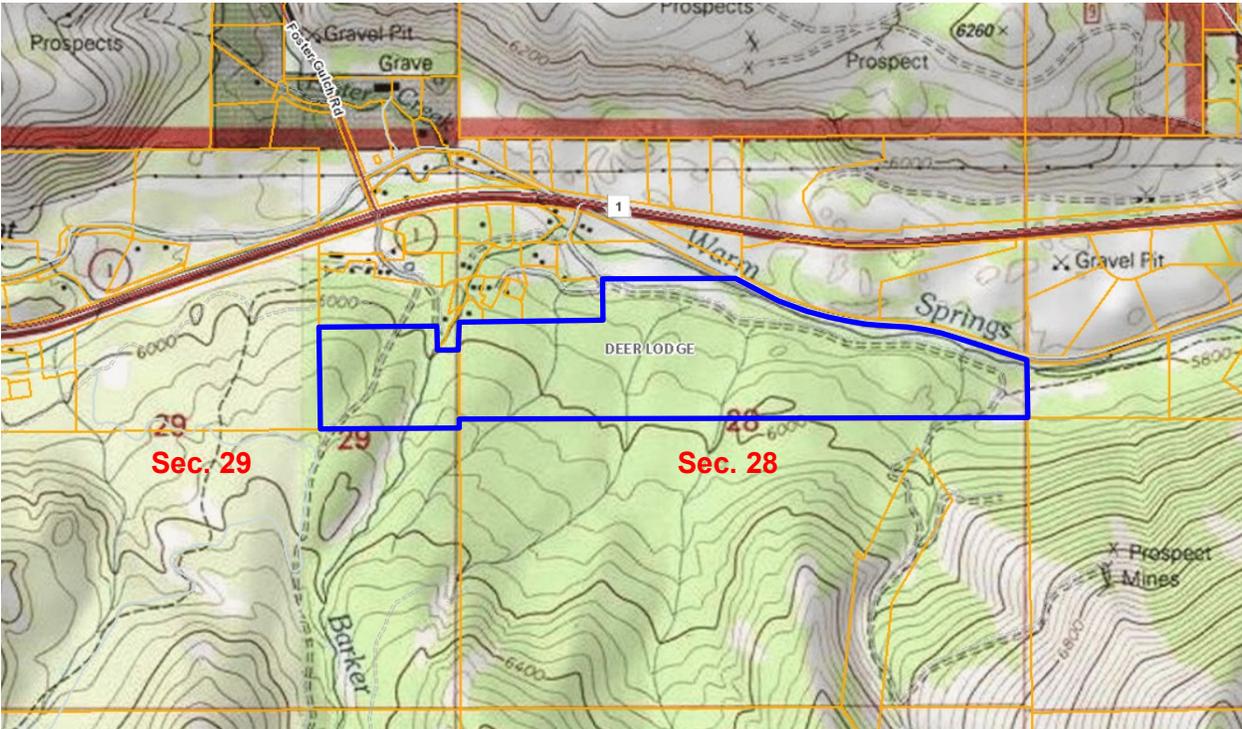


Figure 4. Proposed 154-acre addition (outlined in blue) to Garrity Mountain WMA. Motorized access to the parcel is in Section 28, driving south (from MT Highway 1) on Barker Creek Road into the center portion of the addition.

1.4 Relevant Plans

FWP Comprehensive Fish & Wildlife Management Strategy

The State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) identifies community types, focal areas, and species in Montana with significant issues that warrant conservation attention. One hundred and twenty-eight Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) are identified in the latest SWAP (revised 2015). Forty-seven of these are identified as being in most critical conservation need. In addition to identifying these species, their associated habitats were prioritized as Community Types of Greatest Conservation Need (CTGCN). Twelve terrestrial CTGCN were identified and streams, rivers, and several lakes and rivers reservoirs were identified as aquatic CTGCN. Conservation efforts implemented in on CTGCN nearly always benefit several species.

The parcels considered for acquisition are comprised of three types of Tier 1 Terrestrial Communities:

- Conifer-dominated forest and woodland (xeric-mesic): 70%
- Conifer-dominated forest and woodland (mesic-wet): 20%
- Floodplain and riparian: 10%

The property, along with the larger GMWMA is also potential habitat for three terrestrial SGCN (western toad, black rosy-finch, and gray-crowned rosy-finch), as well as two aquatic SGCN (bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout).

Montana Natural Resource Damage Program

The Montana Natural Resource Damage Program (NRDP) is responsible for, among other things, administering funds from a natural resource damages settlement between the State of Montana and the Atlantic Richfield Company. The damages received in the 1999 partial settlement, approximately \$130 million, are allocated to restore, rehabilitate, replace, or acquire the equivalent to the injured natural resources in the *Upper Clark Fork River Basin (UCFRB) Aquatic and Terrestrial Resources Restoration Plans* (Restoration Plans). The current project is located in a Priority Two Landscape area of the UCFRB Terrestrial Resources Prioritization Plan and would partially implement Section 4.2.4.7 of the Restoration Plans.

As indicated in the Restoration Plans: 1) Funding for individual projects within aquatic and/or terrestrial priority areas will be based on cost-effectiveness and cost:benefits; and 2) Each project involving property and/or water rights acquisitions and conservation easements will require a subsequent approval by the Trustee of the proposed transaction once developed in accordance with the Restoration Plans by the Trustee, following consideration of input from the public, Advisory Council, and Trustee Restoration Council.

This EA lists many of the reasons why this purchase will implement the goals of the Restoration Plans and is both cost-effective and provides a positive cost:benefit. Acquisition will provide public access for hunting, fishing, hiking, bird-watching, and other wildlife-related outdoor activities, and will replace fish and wildlife habitat by protecting and enhancing habitats similar to those injured. This project also connects with the larger GMWMA, a goal that ranks high in the Restoration Plans project evaluation. The NRDP considers the project to have a favorable cost-benefit relationship given the significant recreational benefits the project offers and other benefits this EA describes and the 36% match from the Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Trust.

The NRDP recommends funding this addition to the WMA for the requested \$266,296. The UCFRB citizens Advisory Council and the Trustee Restoration Council will consider the NRDP's

recommendation and the public comment received from this EA in making their final recommendation to the Governor, who will make the final funding decision.

Anaconda-Deer Lodge County Growth Policy

The 2010 Anaconda-Deer Lodge County (ADLC) Growth Policy serves as a planning guide for local officials and citizens. It summarizes the existing demographic, social, and economic status and trends in ADLC and provides goals and actions for county policy.

Multi-partner initiative

This project is part of an ongoing multi-partner initiative including: the Montana Chapter of the North American Wild Sheep Foundation, the Anaconda Sportsmen Club, the George Grant Chapter of Trout Unlimited, and the Montana Natural Resource Damage Program.

1.5 Authority and Responsibility

FWP has the authority to purchase or otherwise acquire lands that are suitable for game, bird, fish or fur-bearing animal restoration, propagation or protection; for public hunting, fishing, or trapping areas; and for state parks and outdoor recreation per §87-1-209, MCA.

The proposed action constitutes a state action subject to the Montana Environmental Policy Act and other applicable state statutes. FWP is required to analyze the impacts under these requirements before rendering a recommendation for action to the FWP Commission and Board of State Land Commissioners.

2.0 ALTERNATIVES

2.1. Alternative A--Proposed Action: FWP would purchase 154 acres of land from YT Timber for addition to GMWMA.

Under the Proposed Action FWP would purchase a 154-acre parcel from YT Timber for inclusion in GMWMA. The \$416,296 funding for the purchase of the land would come from three grants: \$100,000 from the Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Trust (MFWCT), \$50,000 from Habitat Montana, and \$266,296 from the Montana Natural Resource Damage Program (NRPD).

If the acquisition is approved, the new parcel would be managed as part of GMWMA, and the primary management purposes of GMWMA would continue to be wildlife habitat enhancement and public recreation, including hunting. The purchase of the property would protect a migration corridor for bighorn sheep and critical wildlife habitat, increase public access and recreational opportunities, and prevent possible future subdivision and development of the property.

FWP manages GMWMA under a management plan originated with the purchase of the WMA in 2001 (Appendix). If acquired, FWP would manage the proposed addition to the WMA in accordance with the management plan for the whole WMA, which remains current and applicable at this time.

2.2 Alternative B--No Action: FWP would not purchase 154 acres from YT Timber for addition to GMWMA.

Under the No Action Alternative, FWP would not purchase the 154-acre parcel from YT Timber. The current owner has indicated that they prefer to sell to FWP, but if the agency does not purchase the property they will likely sell to a private buyer. Other parcels owned by the seller and not included in this sale are being sold to private buyers and would likely be subdivided or otherwise developed.

2.3 Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Further Analysis

The proposed purchase of this parcel was the only alternative considered. Purchasing a smaller amount of land than the full 154 acres would not have achieved the desired conservation objectives.

3.0 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND ENVIRONMENT CONSEQUENCES

3.1 LAND USE

Proposed Action: The land acquired by FWP for inclusion in GMWMA would be managed in the same manner as the rest of the WMA in accordance to direction currently outlined in the draft (2010) management plan for GMWMA (Appendix). Management priority would continue to be for the benefit of native fish and wildlife resources and public access and recreation. YT Timber, the current owners of the parcel, have historically allowed public access on their land, and FWP's acquisition of these lands would assure continued public access. Motorized public access to and within GMWMA would not be gained or lost as an outcome of the proposed acquisition at this time. Any mineral interests owned by YT Timber attached to the parcels would be transferred to FWP upon acquisition. There are no known water rights (WR) attached to the parcels, but if WR were to exist, they would be transferred to FWP upon acquisition.

No Action: Under the No Action Alternative, the proposed purchase would not occur, and land use on the YT Timber parcel would likely change if the land were sold to another private buyer. The new owner could subdivide or otherwise develop the property, per ADLC regulations. In that scenario, it is highly likely that public access on and through the property would no longer be allowed and that additional fencing would be erected.

3.2 Vegetation

Proposed Action: Under FWP management, timber harvest on purchased property would be unlikely to occur in the near-term because of the value of these timber stands as wildlife security cover. FWP's management direction would be to recruit large trees and snags in the future for value as wildlife habitat. Although forest management would be a management priority in the long run to recruit and maintain forest stands of highest value for wildlife, there would not be an immediate need for active forest management except for possible spot sanitation harvests for disease control.

Noxious weed management of the proposed addition would fall under the existing GMWMA Management Plan and in accordance with §7-22-215, Montana Code Annotated (MCA) and Montana's Statewide Integrated Noxious Weed Management Plan (2008). Under the GMWMA Management Plan, any isolated patches of noxious weeds are eradicated by the most efficient and effective means (e.g., hand-pulling, digging or herbicide spot treatment), depending on weed species and site limitations. FWP's priority for herbicide control of noxious weeds on the subject lands is to spray roadsides and any recent logging landings, skid trails, and other disturbed sites. Roadsides are inspected annually to detect and eradicate new weed introductions before infestations become established. As an additional preventive measure, FWP confines motorized traffic to a designated open road system and otherwise avoids disturbance of soil surfaces.

Ongoing noxious weed control requires cooperation and partnership with USFS, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC), and neighboring private landowners to ensure its effectiveness throughout the property. FWP provides an annual report on its weed management activities.

Overall, the effect on vegetation from the proposed exchange would be positive, as the parcel proposed for addition would not be subdivided or developed and would be managed in accordance with the rest of GMWMA, which prioritizes native species, manages noxious weeds, and otherwise encourages healthy plant communities.

No Action: If FWP does not purchase the property, the future ownership and use of those land is unknown. The current owner has indicated that if FWP does not purchase the property it would likely be sold to another interested buyer. That buyer could subdivide or develop the property to their needs. Subdivision and/or development of the property into rural residences would be the most likely scenario. Such development on the northern boundary of GMWMA could negatively impact vegetation by clearing native vegetation, replanting with nonnative species, and possibly increasing the presence of invasive species. The level of this action is unknown since the future impacts to resources would be dependent on the property's new owner(s).

3.3 Wildlife Species

One hundred fifty-one wildlife species (48 mammals, 97 birds, 4 amphibians, and 2 reptiles) have been verified in the Anaconda area in habitats like those found on the proposed addition to GMWMA. Aspen, conifer stands, riparian areas, and native grasslands provide important seasonal ranges for multiple species.

Montana Species of Concern (SOC¹) and Potential SOC (PSOC) potentially present on the property (either foraging or breeding) include the dwarf shrew, Preble's shrew, little brown bat, hoary bat, silver-haired bat, fringed myotis, porcupine, western toad, western screech owl, great gray owl, golden eagle, northern goshawk, peregrine falcon, veery, great blue heron, Cassin's finch, Clark's nutcracker, evening grosbeak, rufous hummingbird, brown creeper, green-tailed towhee, gray-crowned rosy finch, pileated woodpecker, and Lewis's woodpecker. The property is also potential habitat for the black rosy-finch, an SGCN, as is the gray-crowned rosy-finch and western toad. Wildlife that are targeted for restoration in the NRDP's Restoration Plan (NRDP 2012) that are likely to use habitat on the property include waterfowl, herons, raptors, amphibians, woodpeckers, insectivorous birds, bats, and burrowing mammals.

Proposed Action: Under the Proposed Action, wildlife species would be expected to benefit by the conservation of critical habitat and migratory routes. The proposed acquisition and the adjacent GMWMA provide winter range for elk, white-tailed deer, mule deer, bighorn sheep, and moose, as well as a variety of other wildlife. The riparian areas provide forage and breeding sites for many birds, bats, small carnivores, and amphibians.

The parcel is also in a bighorn sheep migration corridor between Blue-Eyed Nellie WMA north of MT Highway 1 and GMWMA to the south. The property fills in an important gap in public ownership that provides for connectivity and wildlife movement across a broader landscape. The Warm Springs Creek drainage is dominated by narrow steep-sided valleys, making the property along the mainstem especially important for east-west wildlife movement. The current owner wishes to sell to FWP to ensure that existing habitat is not further fractured and this important corridor is protected.

¹ A Species of Concern is a native animal (or plant) breeding in Montana that is considered to be "at risk" due to declining population trends, threats to its habitats, and/or restricted distribution. The purpose of Montana's SOC listing is to highlight species in decline and encourage conservation efforts to reverse population declines and prevent the need for future listing as Threatened or Endangered Species under the Federal Endangered Species Act.

Wildlife habitat on the proposed acquisition would be protected and enhanced under the GMWMA Management Plan. GMWMA is closed each year from December 1 to noon on May 15 to provide critical winter habitat for elk, deer and bighorn sheep.

No Action: If no action were taken, FWP would lose an opportunity to further protect and enhance critical wildlife habitat in the area, and conservation and recreational objectives would likely not be met. The specific 154-acre parcel considered for acquisition would likely be sold to a private buyer and could be subdivided or otherwise developed. Negative impacts that typically follow such rural development include clearing land of native vegetation in favor of non-native ornamentals that do not provide the desired forage and cover for native wildlife species, increased incidence of human-wildlife conflict, more fencing and other barriers to animal movement and migration, and more light and noise pollution.

3.4 Fisheries Species and Water Resources

Proposed Action: Under the Proposed Action, water and riparian resources would be maintained or enhanced by acquisition and inclusion into the larger GMWMA. Approximately 3,000 feet of Warm Springs Creek and 750 feet of Barker Creek would be acquired and added to the larger GMWMA for permanent conservation. These creeks provide habitat for a wide variety of aquatic and riparian-dependent species, and Warm Spring Creek is identified as bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout habitat, both SGCN in the Upper Clark Fork. The proposed acquisition would preclude development of the properties, which could negatively affect aquatic and riparian habitat through clearing of streamside vegetation, discharge of nutrients or other chemicals into the streams, and other potentially negative impacts.

No Action: If FWP does not purchase the property, it is unknown how water resources would be affected by the management of future owners but could include negative actions such as clearing of riparian vegetation and runoff chemical pollution from lawns, gardens, and roads.

3.5 Aesthetics and Recreation Opportunities

The proposed addition is currently undeveloped forested land that is largely indistinguishable from the adjoining GMWMA. The current owners, YT Timber, have historically allowed public access to and recreation on the property year-round.

Proposed Action: Under the proposed action the viewshed of the area would be unchanged from its current state. Public access to the property would continue but would be managed under GMWMA regulations, which does not allow year-round use. Rather, non-motorized public access would be allowed (off designated open roads) annually from noon on May 15 to November 30. To the extent that recreation does not conflict with the conservation of soil, water, vegetation, and wildlife, the property would provide opportunities for hunting, wildlife viewing, trapping, hiking, camping, mountain biking, horseback riding, picnicking, and other non-motorized recreation. In order to preserve the high wildlife values of the parcel, Garrity Mountain WMA is closed from December 1 until noon on May 15 to provide critical winter habitat for elk, deer and bighorn sheep. The proposed acquisition would protect the aesthetics of the area and public access to the property in perpetuity.

No Action: If the proposed acquisition does not occur, future use of and changes to the parcel are unknown. Most likely, a new private landowner would subdivide and/or develop the property, as well as restrict or prohibit public use of and access across the parcel to the larger GMWMA, as well as potentially compromising the aesthetics of the area.

3.6 Community and Taxes

The official estimated population of ADLC was 9,150 people for year 2014 (US Census Bureau 2014). If population trends continue, the estimated population in 2018 is projected to be 9,004. State and local government are the largest local employers, followed by health care and tourism. The ADLC Growth Policy states the following goals:

- Build a stable diversity of basic businesses and industries in and around Anaconda.
- Create opportunities for local government, economic development organizations, and the local business community to work together on projects and programs to promote business and industry development.
- Expand visitation and tourism as a component of the base economy.
- Focus on renewable alternative energy development as both a means to expand the base economy and to foster community sustainability.
- Support job opportunities so that more young people can remain in the community after graduation from high school, college, or trade school, and to attract new residents and families to the community.
- Reduce the ‘leakage’ of retail dollars going to other communities.

The current estimated property taxes on the combined 154 acres are approximately \$166 yearly. Tax payments are the same for FWP as for those paid by a private owner.

Proposed Action: No change to the tax base would result from the proposed acquisition. FWP is required by law to make tax payments to counties equal to what a private landowner would pay. Purchase of the property would, however, preclude future subdivision or development of the land and potential increased revenues to ADLC that might result.

No Action: Under the No Action Alternative the impact to county tax rolls is dependent on the actions of future owners. If the current owner sells to an entity that wishes to subdivide or otherwise develop the property, then the taxable value to ADLC would be expected to increase.

3.7 Cumulative Impacts

Proposed Action: If FWP completes the proposed purchase there would be positive near- and long-term effects to fish and wildlife, native vegetation, and public recreational access and opportunities. The addition of the 154 acres would facilitate management of the existing WMA, protect critical wildlife migration corridors, provide winter range for elk and other ungulates, preclude subdivision, and otherwise conserve the high conservation value of the property in perpetuity.

No Action: If FWP did not purchase the property, FWP would lose an opportunity to acquire property of high conservation and public recreational value in the area. The long-term effects of not acquiring this property are difficult to predict as the next owner(s) and future use of the land is unknown. However, unless the purchaser were another conservation buyer, there are likely to be long-term negative impacts to fish, wildlife, and public recreation values.

4.0 RESOURCE ISSUES CONSIDERED BUT ELIMINATED FROM DETAILED ANALYSIS

The Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) provides for the identification and elimination from detailed study of issues which are not significant, or which have been covered by a prior environmental review, narrowing the discussion of these issues to a brief presentation of why they would not have a significant effect on the physical or human environment or providing a reference to their coverage elsewhere (Administrative Rules of Montana 12.2.434(d)). While these resources are important, FWP anticipates they would be unaffected by the proposed action or if there are any effects, those influences could be adequately mitigated and as a result, these resources were eliminated from further detailed analysis.

4.1 Soils

No new soil disturbing activities are planned for the YT Timber addition parcel. Any existing mineral rights held by the current landowner will transfer to FWP, and a minerals report has been ordered for the property.

4.2 Air Quality

FWP does not plan on any construction or development activities that could affect particulate levels and air quality if it acquires the property under the proposed action. Under the no action alternative, construction and other development is possible and even likely, but those impacts could be minor, short in duration, and unlikely to result in measurable changes to ambient air quality.

4.3 Noise and Electrical Effects

Potential for changes in noise levels are expected to be low since the rural character of the property would persist and YT Timber currently allows public use of the property. If the property were to be subdivided and/or developed there could be an increase in noise but (depending on future use of the property) the impacts are likely to be low and unlikely to impact wildlife beyond the immediate area. Human residents in the area would be unlikely to be affected.

Existing electrical structures (cell phone and radio repeater towers) and pipelines would not be affected by either alternative.

4.4 Risk and Health Hazards

As part of FWP's due diligence, the department is conducting a hazardous materials survey prior to the acquisition of the parcel in the Proposed Action Alternative.

4.5 Cultural and Historical Resources

State agencies are required by law to consult with the State Historic Preservation Office to identify and locate any heritage properties on lands owned by the state and to assess if they would be adversely impacted by a proposed action or development project (§22-3-433, MCA); FWP will request a SHPO report.

Proposed Action: The proposed acquisition would have either a neutral or positive effect on cultural and historical resources by securing and managing any existing resources into public ownership. No negative impact is expected, as FWP does not plan any excavation activities in conjunction with this acquisition.

No Action: Under the no-action alternative, historic and cultural resources would not likely be protected if (and as) any excavation were to occur during private land development such as home site building.

5.0 NEED FOR AN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

Based upon the above assessment, which has identified a very limited number of minor impacts from the proposed action, an EIS is not required, and an Environmental Assessment is the appropriate level of review.

6.0 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

6.1 Public Involvement

The public would be notified as follows, to comment on the proposed Garrity Mountain WMA Addition Project, including its draft EA and alternatives:

- A news release would be prepared and distributed to a standard list of media outlets interested in FWP Region 2 issues. This news release would also be posted on FWP Region 2's website <http://fwp.mt.gov/regions/r2/>.
- Two legal notices in each of these newspapers: *Anaconda Leader*, *Independent Record* (Helena), *Missoulian*, *Montana Standard* (Butte), and *Silver State Post* (Deer Lodge)..
- Copies would be available at the FWP Region 2 Headquarters in Missoula and the FWP State Headquarters in Helena.
- Copies of this environmental assessment would be mailed (or notification of its availability emailed) to neighboring landowners and other interested parties (individuals, groups, agencies) to assure their knowledge of the Proposed Action.
- Public notice on FWP's webpage: <http://fwp.mt.gov> ("News," then "Recent Public Notices"). The Draft EA would also be available on this website, along with the opportunity to submit comments online.

Copies of this EA may be obtained by mail from Region 2 FWP, 3201 Spurgin Rd., Missoula MT, 5980; by phoning 406-542-5540; by emailing srose@mt.gov; or by viewing FWP's website <http://fwp.mt.gov> under Public Notices.

This level of public notice and participation is appropriate for a project of this scope having few physical and human impacts.

6.2 Duration of Comment Period

The public comment period will extend for thirty (30) days beginning December 18, 2018. Written comments will be accepted until 5:00 p.m. on January 16, 2019 and can be mailed to the address below:

Region 2 FWP
Attn: Garrity Mtn EA
3201 Spurgin Rd
Missoula, MT 59804

or emailed to Sharon Rose at shrose@mt.gov

Questions may be directed to Sharon Rose at the above contacts or by phoning 406-542-5540.

6.3 Timeline of Events

Public Review (30-day) period: December 18, 2018 to January 16, 2019.

Public Hearing: FWP will hold a **public hearing** in Anaconda on January 3, 2019 (Thursday) at 7:00 p.m. at the AOH Hall (106 Cherry Street) to discuss the proposal, answer questions and take public comment

Approval:

- FWP would request action on this proposal from the Fish & Wildlife Commission at its regularly scheduled meeting on February 13, 2019 in Helena.
- The proposal would also require approval by the State Land Board.

6.4 Offices/Programs contacted or contributing to this document:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks:

Lands Bureau, Helena
Legal Bureau, Helena
Parks Division, Helena
Responsive Management Unit, Helena
Wildlife and Fisheries Division, Missoula

Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Helena MT

Montana Historical Society, Helena, MT

Montana Natural Heritage Program, Helena MT

Montana Natural Resource Damage Program, Helena MT

Montana State Historic Preservation Office, Helena MT

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Soil Survey Database

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Wetlands Database

U.S. Forest Service, Helena MT

7.0 EA PREPARATION

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Sharon Rose, Comments Coordinator, Missoula, MT

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APPENDIX

GARRITY MOUNTAIN WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA DRAFT MANAGEMENT PLAN May 2, 2001

INTRODUCTION

Phase one (5789 acres) of the Garrity Mountain/Clear Creek Wildlife Management Area was acquired in Feb. 2001. These lands were purchased through the ~~National~~ Natural Resource Damage Program for the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks from the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation-YT Timber Company. Phase Two of the acquisition (3181 acres) is scheduled to proceed through the Natural Resource Damage Program during 2001 and be completed in 2002. This management Plan is intended to apply to the entire property and is based on the assumption that Phase Two of the acquisition will be approved.

Garrity Mtn/Clear Creek WMA

	Garrity Mtn.	Clear Creek
Phase I	4343	1446
Phase II	2364	819
Total	6707	2265

The purpose of the WMA is to provide winter range for the Bighorn sheep herd, elk, mule deer and whitetail deer. Secondly, the WMA was purchased to improve habitat for other wildlife species and to enhance public recreational opportunities, watershed, and scenic vistas.

Phase One (5789 acres) of the WMA was purchased for \$3,763,207.50 from the Upper Clark Fork Basin Restoration Fund. This document is the first comprehensive Management Plan for the Garrity Mountain/Clear Creek WMA and will set the basic management direction established under the present circumstances. It is intended that this plan be updated periodically to maintain its flexibility.

Area Description

The Garrity Mountain/Clear Creek WMA involves two separate pieces of property. The Garrity Mtn. parcel covers a total of 6707 acres located on Garrity Mountain approximately three miles west of Anaconda, MT (Figure 1). Approximately 2400 acres of the area is open bunchgrass rangeland at elevation from 6,800 to 8,000 feet. The remaining 4300 acres are predominately second growth lodgepole pine. The Clear Creek parcel covers a total of 2265 acres at the head of the Clear Creek Drainage south of Anaconda. The Clear Creek property ranges from 6700 to 9000 feet in elevation. The two parcels are separated by a section of Butte Water Company lands.

GOAL

Manage for highly productive, diverse vegetative communities that will provide high quality forage and cover for native wildlife species, with an emphasis on bighorn sheep, elk and mule deer, white-tailed deer winter/spring forage supplies; and manage for hunting and other recreational opportunities for the public and access to National Forest lands.

Objective 1:

Prevent soil erosion and conserve and improve the vegetation communities, striving for maximum vegetation diversity dependent on soil types.

Problem 1: Incomplete vegetation analysis and documentation. At present there are no vegetation analysis transects to understand plant composition or forage production or utilization.

Strategy: Establish vegetation transects to determine plant community composition, monitor vegetation trends, forage production and utilization. Establish transects and/or enclosures and systematically collect data based on the recommendations of the Department's plant ecologist.

Problem 2: The purchase agreement negotiated by the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and YT Timber allows for the harvest of 5.2 million board feet of timber from the property until Dec. 2008. YT Timber will adhere to harvesting guidelines as per Exhibit B "Timber Harvest Policy" of the Purchase Agreement with annual review by the Dept. FWP and the RMEF. The extent and location of harvest will be at YT's discretion as defined in the Purchase agreement. Site specific management decisions will have to wait until timber harvest has been completed for any specific section.

Strategy: Monitor timber harvest activities and verify completion on specific sections. Develop appropriate management responses as timber harvest progresses and try to anticipate needed actions.

Problem 3: Control noxious weeds on the property.

Strategy: Annually evaluate range conditions and implement management practices that will improve range conditions and reduce soil erosion. Implement biological control measures for leafy spurge and evaluate chemical control options. Monitor timber harvest areas and access roads for the spread of noxious weeds. Manage to contain and reduce existing weed infestations and eradicate new species and infestations.

Strategy: All road construction equipment and equipment used in off road logging activity must be washed by the contractor and inspected by YT Forest Officer prior to entering the area to prevent direct transfer of weed seed to the site.

Problem 4: Trespass livestock. Boundary fences are incomplete or nonexistent.

Strategy: Prioritize fence construction needs. The initial emphases will be on the eastern boundary adjacent to private lands. Select fence type that requires minimal maintenance and poses the least hazard to wildlife movement. Inspect fences annually and work closely with neighbors on cooperative fence management.

Problem 5: Effects of public access. Increased public access, particularly with respect to vehicles, can result in habitat damage.

Strategy: Prohibit off road vehicle use. Restrict vehicle access to established road right of way as defined in Exhibit C to Amended Reciprocal Easement Agreement. Implement seasonal closures and provide adequate parking facilities and signing to protect WMA soils and vegetation. Proposed restrictions attached.

Problem 6: Fire Protection and Management

Strategy: The area is within the Anaconda Forest fire Protection District and will be assessed by the DNRC.

Strategy: Adopt YT Fire Protection contract terms and DNRC Forest Fire Rules and Regulations for the WMA. (attached)

Objective 2:

Manage for a wintering population of 50+ bighorn sheep, 200 elk and 100 mule deer; provide for upland game bird production and maintain existing nongame species.

Problem 1: Elk use of the WMA has been and is expected to increase. The major portion of this herd's winter range lies on the WMA and private lands to the east. This population has increased from 40 to 175 head in the past 12 years.

Strategy 1: Continue efforts to work with private landowners on public hunting access in order to control herd size. Acquisition of the WMA will ensure public hunting access on a portion of the range and provide additional hunting management options. Harvest sheep, elk and deer populations annually to maintain animal numbers at or with range capacity during all but the most severe winters.

Problem 2: The harvest of 5.2 million board feet of timber will significantly alter the habitat conditions on the Garrity Mountain property for bull elk security during the general hunting season. This along with an increase in public access may result in an increased harvest rate for bull elk in District 214.

Strategy 2: Monitor the harvest rate of bulls and post season bull/cow ratios as per Elk Management Plan. Implement access restrictions and/or season changes as needed.

Objective 3:

Provide for public hunting and recreation.

Problem 1: Increased and/or unlimited public access may conflict with management objectives of providing high quality secure winter range.

Strategy 1: Establish seasonal travel and access restrictions to protect winter range values for big game species while providing reasonable access and recreational opportunities. Maintain information signs explaining the need for and actual travel restrictions. Close the WMA to public travel from: Dec. 1-May 15, exception for Lion hunting: Dec 1-15.

Problem 2: Off road vehicle travel damages soils and vegetation.

Strategy 2: Prohibit off road vehicle travel. Restrict vehicular travel to designated open roads. Erect and maintain signs to inform the public of travel restrictions.

Problem 3: Conflicts have occurred in the past regarding vehicular hunting access between general public and YT employees on the property.

Strategy 3: Prohibit YT employees or contractors from carrying firearms in their vehicles on state property during the general hunting seasons while they are engaged in timber harvest activity. No firearms or archery equipment will be allowed in vehicles on state property beyond areas closed to motorized vehicles.

Objective 4:

Manage habitat for a variety of upland game birds, predators and non game species.

Problem: Need to document species present.

Strategy 1: Develop a species list of resident and migratory species using the WMA by habitat type.

Strategy 2: Continue proper land management practices featuring high quality big game winter range which has and will provide for other species.

GARRITY MOUNTAIN

For the Garrity Mountain parcel two land management or habitat units are delineated for purposes of this Plan on the basis of topography, vegetation, wildlife use and other management considerations.

Winter Range Slopes and Basins- The WMA has approximately 2400 acres of bunchgrass rangelands. This type provide the important bighorn sheep, elk, mule deer and whitetail deer winter range. The primary grass species are rough fescue, Idaho fescue, and bluebunch wheatgrass. These south/east facing slopes, basins and benches are the key component of this easement. These grasslands have not received domestic livestock grazing in the reported history of the area. They represent the native bunchgrass rangelands historically found in the Upper Clark Fork Basin.

Forested- The predominate timber type (4300 acres) found on the property is lodgepole pine. These represent second growth timber following extensive harvesting at the turn of the last century. This component provides important thermal and hiding cover for wintering elk. It also provides a diversity of habitat for a diversity of other wildlife species. As part of the purchase agreement negotiated by the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and YT Timber, YT Timber will remove 5.2 million board feet of timber from the property. YT Timber will have until Dec. 2008 to complete their harvesting activities on the property.

CLEAR CREEK

The Clear Creek parcel has been broken into two habitat types for the purpose of the plan.

Forest types- A baseline inventory would be necessary to accurately delineate the specific timber types on this property. They would be characterized by Douglas fir at lower elevations and white bark pine/spruce at higher elevations

Rock/Scree- Approximately 700 acres of this parcel will be characterized as a rock/scree type. This type is found on the higher elevation north slopes of Clear Creek and the west-side of Fifer Gulch.

MONITORING

Management Actions: management actions will be evaluated through the MEPA process.

Vegetation: Vegetation transects will be established with the guidance of the Department's plant ecologist. These will be directed toward determining species composition, plant succession and forage production. The transects will be run annually or as they are established to monitor long term trends. Photo plots will be established to monitor vegetation trends over time.

Timber Harvest: Timber harvest volumes will be monitored according to Exhibit B "Timber Harvest Policy" of the Purchase Agreement. Bi-monthly harvest reports from YT will be reviewed. Annual inspections with YT Timber and the RMEF will monitor and map the area and extent of timber harvest. Photo points will be established by GPS units to establish vegetative recovery and trends in harvest areas.

Populations: Numbers of bighorn sheep, elk, white-tailed deer, and mule deer will be monitored by fixed wing aircraft, helicopter, and ground observation during the winter and spring. Monthly observations will be used to determine total use and correlated to forage production to refine population objectives for the WMA.

Public use: Man days of use will be determined by public contact and traffic counters. This information will be used to determine travel and seasonal restrictions.